

The Passover Paradigm and Christian Spirituality

Dwight A. Pryor

IN THE JEWISH READING of Scripture, the Torah was first given at Mount Sinai to Israel on Pentecost or the Festival of Weeks (*Shavu'ot*). As Christians we should understand however that the Torah that was “written in former days” (Rom 15:4), was “written down for our instruction” as well (1 Cor 10:11).

This should not come as a surprise. After all, the Hebrew Scriptures (including in Greek translation) constituted the Holy Bible for the early church, even into the second and third centuries. The “New Testament” did not exist as such, only the “memoirs of the Apostles” (the gospels) and occasional letters to the saints in diverse congregations throughout the Roman world. Grafted into Israel’s fertile olive tree, repentant Gentile believers in Yeshua now worshiped the God of Israel and were nurtured in their walk of faith by Israel’s Holy Scriptures. Through Abraham and his seed they obtained a spiritual inheritance; in the Law, Prophets and Writings they received a godly heritage that daily informed, instructed and inspired them.

Those “God-breathed” scriptures (2 Tim 3:15-16) were profitable for instruction then and continue to be so today. Indeed for today’s New

Testament-centered churches, the sacred writings of the *Tanakh* (Old Testament) serve as an invaluable counter-balance and even corrective for Christian tendencies at times to become too Hellenistic in theology and worldview.

As a case in point, consider last month’s column (May 2008), where we asked the question, “*What was the end or goal of the Exodus?*” Applying the lessons learned there—i.e., using the Passover paradigm—let us answer an equally important parallel question for Christians. From God’s point of view, “*What is the end or goal of salvation?*” Is it going to heaven?

1] **Redemption.** “*You know that you were ransomed ... by the precious blood of Messiah, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish*” (1 Pet 1:18-19). Our Passover Lamb was sacrificed that we might be set free from the Egypt of sin and death. But what were we set free for?

2] **Relationship.** “*Through [Messiah] you have come to trust in God...*” (1 Pet 1:21). Because of Messiah’s redemptive act, those of us “having no hope and without God in the world” (Eph 2:12) have “turned to God from idols, to serve the living and true God” (1 Thes 1:9). We have been brought nigh to the God of Abraham and made fellow citizens and adopted children in the household of faith and covenant heritage of Israel (Eph 2:19). Because of His great love, God saves us in order to foster an intimate relationship with us.

3] **Revelation.** “*Learn from me...*” (Matt 11:29). Yeshua came as a rabbi because his teaching ministry was every bit as integral to his mission as his climactic act of sacrifice on a

Roman cross. He came to show us the Father and to impart His spirit and life, which he did as an itinerant Jewish Sage continually expounding and embodying the words of Torah and the Prophets. God saves us so that as His beloved children we can come to know the fullness of His will and wisdom.

4] **Responsibility.** We are saved to be “*a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people...*” (1 Pet 2:19). In other words, we are saved to serve. Not for our sakes alone, we are saved for God’s sake. As with Israel, our redemption elicits a corresponding responsibility and our salvation issues a summons to serve the one, true God. That summons became incarnate in Jesus’ call: “*Follow me!*” (Matt 4:19). When we keep the commandments, the Kingdom of God advances in the world to the ever increasing glory of the Father.

5] **Residence.** “*In [Messiah] you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit*” (Eph 2:22). Greek thought stresses an other-worldly spirituality, with our “true home” in heaven. The Passover paradigm reminds us however that we are not saved just to be taken out of this world but to help bring God *into* the world, to extend His redemption and advance His kingdom in the earth – a goal that one day shall be consummated in Zion (cf. Rev 21:3ff). Therefore when we turn our hearts truly home we will heed the voice of the One calling: “*Build me a sanctuary...*” (Exo 25:8).

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Dwight A. Pryor

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